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ABSTRACT

An instrument was developed to measure the perceptions of principals toward problems related to educational vouchers (EVs). Thirty-four items concerning freedom of choice, equalization, segregation, church and state issues, and enrollment and recruitment were originally chosen through a literature review. Seventeen graduate students in administration and supervision rated the instrument's content, clarity, format, and readability well. In March of 1992, formal validation involved submitting the instrument to 44 school administrators (31 from Louisiana and 13 from Mississippi) to assess the face validity. After 2 weeks, the Louisiana group received the instrument a second time as the posttest. The pre and post pilot data were factor analyzed. Five factors (attitude/perception toward EVs, institutional effect of EVs, effect of EVs on educational standards, effect of EVs on privatization, and effect of EVs on enrollment) were analyzed for reliability. A block of items was removed that did not contribute to internal consistency, reducing the number of items to 18. In July of 1992, reliability and validation with factor analysis were performed on the revised instrument using a pilot study of 44 graduate students. A consistency analysis was done. Perceptions about EVs are based on at least two underlying factors that have sweeping implications for schools and communities. Two complications presented by the EV system (administrative perceptions and institutional effect) can now be measured and addressed using the developed instrument. Four tables are included. (RLC)

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The Development of an Instrument: Perceptions of Principals Toward Educational Vouchers

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The concept of educational vouchers is an old one dating back over 200 years. Yet, in modern times it still stimulates considerable thought from school system constituencies and educational leaders.

The concept of a voucher system is easy to understand and straightforward. The government issues payments (vouchers) directly to parents of school age children who select the school of their choice in which to enroll their children. The school may be public, private, or sectarian (Catterall, 1984). According to Catterall, the pupil or the family selects a school and uses the voucher as payment for the educational program provided. The school exchanges all vouchers it collects in order to receive funds from the government.

A classical voucher idea was first proposed by Milton Friedman in the 1960s. Friedman believed that public education was a monopoly and that vouchers were necessary in order to equalize education (as cited in Lieberman, 1989). Liberals took this idea and attached social reform to it (Lindelow, 1983).

Educational vouchers lend themselves to several kinds of free interpretations. They can be developed along different lines to express different social, economic, or political aims. As a result, it is very difficult to be pro or anti-voucher in principle because vouchers

can be adapted to serve so many different principles.

According to Clinchy and Cody (1978), schools have educated the masses and now these educated masses want a choice. A new consumerism demanding choice is now rising in the nation. Clinchy and Cody also point out that schools have become more standardized in order to accomplish the goal of educating the masses. However, parents now find themselves in a system that has little diversity or choice, and many are demanding schools with alternative programs which would be more compatible with individual educational goals.

For nearly two hundred years, the voucher idea slept quietly in the back pages of capitalist philosophy. Then, starting in the 1950s, the idea began to be seen as a means to other capitalistic ends--such as segregation, aid for private schools, reforming school finance, and equalizing opportunities.

The voucher idea is at least as old as Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations, originally written in 1776 (1952). Smith proposed that the government should give money directly to the parents for the purchase of educational services, in order to inject some creativity and competition into the stagnant educational monopoly of the day. He believed that parents are as wise as the government in choosing a school. Thomas Paine brought this idea to America and

added that the poor should be given special consideration and that all parents should be required to purchase education for their children (Lindelow, 1983).

In 1859, John Stuart Mill, in his essay "On Liberty," wrote that the government should require a minimum education for all children, but that parents should have the right to choose where their children were to be educated. He warned against state controlled education (1952).

Only in the last decade have the ideas of Smith, Payne, and Mill been further developed. This eighty-year hiatus was probably due to the increasing popularity of compulsory public education, a trust in the American nativism, and the creation of a new American culture due to the influx of so many immigrants. The public schools taught a largely Protestant set of values to a diverse population (Lindelow, 1983).

> Perhaps no issue today triggers a more lively discussion than educational vouchers. Whether they are viewed as a mortal threat to public schools or as a legitimate expression of individual freedom--or somewhere in between--most people have strong opinions on the matter. (Lindelow, 1983, p. iv)

The educational voucher argument increases in complexity as one tries to find a common definition. Like a coat of many colors, voucher plans differ in many ways. Various

models exist; some tend to be laissez-faire, while others are highly regulated; some focus on educational equity, while others emphasize exclusiveness of interest.

Educational vouchers are a concern to many Americans as they relate to school reform. Although the concept of vouchers is simple by definition, it becomes quite complex in its implementation for school reform. For example, the concept of an open school market or uncontrolled freedom of choice is very appealing to most Americans. Who could be against a parent receiving a voucher from the government for the purpose of choosing a school? With unrestricted choice, however, some schools would be overcrowded while others would lose enrollment. The Alum Rock experiment confirms that parents choose schools for reasons other than academics and, therefore, school improvement would not automatically follow (Leary, 1978).

Leaders in education, business, industry, and government have voiced their opinions regarding educational vouchers. Middle management in education, namely principals, need to be heard on these concerns. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop an instrument to measure the perceptions of public and private school principals toward the problems of educational vouchers.

Method

Thirty-four items were originally chosen for the

instrument through a review of the literature related to educational vouchers. The literature revealed five major areas from which the initial items were selected. They were as follows: (a) freedom of choice, (b) equalization, (c) segregation, (d) church and state issues, and (e) enrollment and recruitment. The items were developed with a scale of 1 to 4: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, and 4 = strongly disagree. Initially, 17 graduate students in administration and supervision were asked to examine the instrument and give their opinions regarding content, clarity, format, and readability. The instrument was rated well in all four areas. The suggestions which were made were incorporated into the revised instrument.

In March of 1992, formal validation was initiated by first submitting the instrument to 44 school administrators--31 from Louisiana and 13 from Mississippi--who assessed the face validity and gave responses. Two weeks after the first administration, a second administration was given to the group from Louisiana as the posttest. To make the necessary analysis, the pre and post pilot data were factor analyzed. Five factors were originally identified and further analyzed for reliability measures. They were named (a) attitude/perception toward educational vouchers, (b) institutional effect of educational vouchers,

(c) effect of educational vouchers on educational standards, (d) the effect of educational vouchers on privatization, and (e) the effect of educational vouchers on enrollment.

Further study of the results revealed a block of original items which did not seem to contribute to the internal consistency of the instrument. Moreover, these items seemed to be more peripheral to the central theme of the study and involved secondary issues such as parental involvement and recruitment. Therefore, this block was removed, reducing the number of items to 18. In July of 1992, reliability and validation with factor analysis were performed a second time on the revised instrument using a pilot study of 44 graduate students as subjects.

Results and Discussion

Initially, a consistency analysis was performed by recording the percentage of total responses which were consistent from pre to post administration of the instrument. Table 1 displays the revised instrument and the preliminary consistency analysis. Pilot subjects answered individual items the same way approximately 75% of the time. Only items a and l were below 60% agreement.

Results from an image analysis, the second factor analysis, revealed that four factors accounted for a large majority of the common variance. Factor 1, perception

toward educational vouchers, was described by high loadings on items a, c, d, e, i, l, m, n, o, p, q, and r (see Table 2. These items represent the respondents' attitude or perception toward educational vouchers. Factor 2, 3, and 4 combined appeared to load on items which had common meaning; therefore, these factors were combined into one composite dimension, institutional effect. The high loadings of this construct on items g, g, h, j, and k seem to point to how a school might be effected by the voucher system.

Further analysis was facilitated by the development of Table 3 which displays only the prominent loadings of Factor 1 and the highest loadings from the combined Factors, 2, 3, and 4. In this display, the consistency of the dimension, institutional effect, as well as perceptions, is more apparent between pre and post administrations of the instrument. Moreover, eigenvalues were combined for factors 2, 3, and 4. Thus, explained variability is 5.15 and 5.73 on the perception construct for pretest and posttest, respectively. Instititional effect then had combined eigenvalues of 3.12 (pretest) and 4.04 (posttest).

The reliability analysis was performed using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for internal consistency and the Pearson Product Moment between pretest and posttest

for stability. The alpha values for perception on the pretest and the posttest were computed to be .84 and .83, respectively. The alpha values for institutional effect on the pretest and the posttest were computed to be .50 and .62, respectively. The overall alpha value for the pretest was computed to be .75 and for the posttest .72 (see Table 4). Thus, internal consistency values were moderate to strong and appeared to be consistent across time from pretest to posttest. Also in Table 3, there were correlations between pre- and post-administrations (stability) having values from .63 to .77. These results indicated moderate to strong stability both for the composite instrument as well as the internal scales.

When initiated for implementation and presented to a community considering such a move, the voucher system generates complications. Each problem, in adopting a voucher system, is somewhat easy to address individually but very difficult in combination with all the others. Two of these complications, perceptions of administration and institutional effect can now be measured and addressed using this instrument. It is apparent that school administrators need to be heard on the topics concerning educational vouchers. As in the success or failure of many school reform issues, the success or failure of educational vouchers might lie in principals' perceptions

toward them.

It is apparent from the preceding analysis and discussion that perceptions concerning educational vouchers seem to be based on at least two underlying factors, and these factors will have sweeping implications for the school and community. More development of this instrument is recommended. Underlying factors contribute to the vouchers' complex nature and further research into voucher systems could reveal more factors.

TABLE 1

PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EDUCATIONAL VOUCHERS

The following statements relate to your perceptions concerning educational vouchers (EV) as defined in the cover letter. According to the following scale, please circle the number by each statement to indicate your level of agreement or disagreement.

1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Disagree 4. Strongly disagree

		% CONSISTENCY
a.	1 2 3 4 EV would have a positive impact on inner-city schools in terms of student achievement.	55
b.	1 2 3 4 EV would cause overcrowding in some schools.	89
c.	1 2 3 4 EV should be a part of a democratic society.	69
d.	1 2 3 4 EV would improve student achievement.	75
e.	1 2 3 4 EV would improve teaching and learning.	81
f.	In your opinion, which of the following socioeconomic groups would benefit from EV.	
	1 2 3 4 Poor	75
	1 2 3 4 Middle class	78
	1 2 3 4 Upper middle class	69
	1 2 3 4 Affluent	67
g.	1 2 3 4 EV would eliminate poor teaching.	89
h.	EV would cause problems in areas such as:	
	1 2 3 4 transportation	92
	1 2 3 4 facilities	86
	1 2 3 4 scheduling	81
i.	1 2 3 4 EV would lead to healthy competition in recruitment of students.	78
j.	1 2 3 4 EV would give an unfair disadvantage in recruitment of students to schools who now have a low academic achievement record.	69
k.	1 2 3 4 EV would have a negative impact on the enrollment of schools supported by a rural community.	64
l.	1 2 3 4 EV would have a negative impact on neighborhood schools.	56
m.	1 2 3 4 Public schools should be privatized (change public schools to free market system).	89
n.	1 2 3 4 EV would guarantee a quality equal opportunity educational system for all children.	86
o.	1 2 3 4 If proposed, I would support a system of EV as defined in this study.	72
p.	1 2 3 4 EV would make schools more accountable.	78
q.	1 2 3 4 EV would make parents more accountable.	69
r.	1 2 3 4 EV would decentralize public schools.	69

Table 2

Factor Analysis

	Pretest Factor Loadings				Posttest Factor Loadings			
Item	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
a	.48	.48	-.29	-.00	.41	-.38	.11	-.01
b	-.21	.28	.00	.52	-.49	.46	-.01	.38
c	.45	.07	-.47	-.05	.75	-.06	.16	.11
d	.58	.39	.21	-.29	.71	.24	.35	.14
e	.73	.41	.08	.01	.83	.24	.11	.11
f	.36	.06	-.19	-.08	-.03	-.11	.21	.42
g	.25	.22	.53	.23	.08	.24	-.48	.17
h	-.12	.27	-.05	.01	-.32	.64	-.35	-.10
i	.69	-.21	-.04	.26	.76	-.01	-.01	.06
j	-.24	.38	.16	-.21	.09	.45	.48	-.32
k	-.29	.52	-.22	.22	-.49	.38	.44	-.14
l	-.41	.04	.22	.12	-.43	.27	.36	-.16
m	.60	-.29	.29	-.01	.68	.09	-.25	-.37

Table 2 (Continued)

Factor Analysis

	Pretest Factor Loadings				Posttest Factor Loadings			
Item	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
n	.76	-.09	.19	-.18	.78	-.25	-.12	-.09
o	.83	-.16	-.19	-.09	.75	-.19	.03	.11
p	.72	-.02	.12	.30	.53	.52	-.27	.15
q	.74	-.17	-.11	.17	.55	.39	-.10	-.05
r	.34	.09	.13	.02	.48	.20	.18	-.24
Eigenvalues	5.16	1.37	1.00	.75	5.73	1.94	1.32	.79

Table 3

Featured Factor Loadings

Item	Pretest Loadings		Posttest Loadings	
	Factor 1	Combined Factors 2, 3 and 4	Factor 1	Combined Factors 2, 3 and 4
a	.48	-	.41	-
b	-	.52	-	.46
c	.45	-	.75	-
d	.58	-	.71	-
e	.73	-	.83	-
f*	.36	-	.42	-
g	-	.53	-	.48
h	-	.27	-	.64
i	.70	-	.76	-
j	-	.42	-	.45
k	-	.52	-	.44
l	.41	-	.43	-
m	.60	-	.68	-
n	.79	-	.78	-
o	.84	-	.75	-
p	.72	-	.53	-
q	.74	-	.55	-
r	.35	-	.48	-
E'values	5.16	3.12	5.73	4.05

Table 4

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach Alpha Values

Factor	Pre-Alpha	Post-Alpha	Stability
Attitude	.84	.83	.77
Inst. Ef.	.50	.62	.63
Overall	.75	.71	.67

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